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HELPING THE POOR AND NEEDY THROUGH EDUCATION: EXAMINING THE SIMILARITIES BETWEEN POVERTY EDUCATION RESEARCH AND ORPHAN EDUCATION

BY CALVIN ROSO

ABSTRACT

God's care and compassion for the less fortunate is mentioned throughout the Bible. This emphasis reminds the Christian educator that the act of helping the helpless is not a suggestion, but one's Christian duty. James 1:27 says, "Pure and genuine religion in the sight of God the Father means caring for orphans and widows in their distress and refusing to let the world corrupt you" (NLT). Jeremiah 22:16 reminds us that to "know God" means helping the widow and the orphan. Likewise, Hosea 12:6 tells us to return to God, "Hold fast to love and mercy, to righteousness and justice, and wait [expectantly] for . . . God continually" (AMP). These verses suggest that when we help the helpless, we know the heart of God and become His hands in the process. This paper addresses the needs of orphans throughout the world by attempting to link research by Ruby Payne and others on educating students living in poverty in the United States with research on orphan education in other nations. The objective is to discover educational methods and a biblical perspective for assisting orphan schools around the world. By doing so, Christian educators can assist the poor and needy through the application of biblical principles to the profession of education.

INTRODUCTION

God's care and compassion for the less fortunate is mentioned throughout the Bible. This emphasis reminds the Christian educator that the act of helping the helpless is not a suggestion, but one's Christian duty. James 1:27 says, "Pure and genuine religion in the sight of God the Father means caring for orphans and widows in their distress and refusing to let the world corrupt you" (NLT). Jeremiah 22:16 reminds us that to "know God" means helping the widow and the orphan. Likewise, Hosea 12:6 tells us to return to God, "Hold fast to love and mercy, to righteousness and justice, and wait [expectantly] for . . . God continually" (AMP). These verses suggest that when we help the helpless, we know the heart of God and become His hands in the process.

Ever since my first trip to an orphanage in Colombia in 2000, I have asked myself the question, "How can I, as an educator, help the poor and the needy through my profession?" This paper addresses the needs of orphans throughout the world by attempting to link research by Ruby Payne and others on educating students living in poverty in the United States with research on orphan education in other nations. The objective is to discover educational methods and a biblical perspective for assisting orphan schools around the world. By doing so, Christian educators can assist the poor and needy through the application of biblical principles to the profession of education.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) are an ongoing international concern due, in part, to the impact of HIV/AIDS and economic and social factors in sub-Saharan Africa and beyond (Deters & Bajaj, 2008; Emond, 2009; UNICEF, 2012). It is estimated that over 132 million children are orphans worldwide (as cited in SOS, n.d.). It is also estimated that each day 5,760 more children become orphans around the world (SOS). The number of orphaned children in sub-Saharan Africa alone equals more than the combined number of children in Canada, Denmark, Ireland, Norway and Sweden (SOS). The tragedy of orphans and vulnerable children can be seen in the description of street girls who:

Toil in the markets selling food or ice water . . . carrying heavy loads on their heads that seem to defy the frailty of their neck. With the number of street children increasing every day, even these jobs are becoming increasingly scarce and as an unfortunate consequence, prostitution is becoming a main source of income for some street girls. At night, they mostly sleep in the open air, rain or shine, on small mats or cardboard. These children usually sleep in groups to protect and support each other (as cited in Deters & Bajaj, 2008, p. 29).

While none would dispute the need to help OVC, and in spite of the vast number of orphans and vulnerable children worldwide, there are few studies that describe the context and conditions in which OVC learn in the orphanage setting (Levin & Haines, 2007).

An *orphan* is defined as a child under 18 who is lacking one or both parents (SOS, n.d.). Orphans who live in an orphanage and have a parent still living, may or may not have some contact with that living parent. OVC are children who “in a given local setting, are the most likely to fall through the cracks of regular programs, policies, and traditional safety nets” (Kielland, 2004). In developing nations, orphans, and street children are seen as the most vulnerable of children due to neglect, abandonment, abuse, and/or separation (Deters & Baja, 2008). Although the precise number of orphanages worldwide is undocumented, orphanages and orphan education are seen as a path to enable children to end generational poverty and move from vulnerability into security and meaningful, productive lives (UNICEF, 2011). If education is seen as a necessary path to help orphans and vulnerable children succeed, what should a quality education for OVC look like?

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to review the literature of poverty education in the United States and compare that literature with research on orphanage education to discover what practices might be transferable to educating orphans.

Educators have been grappling for decades with how to include marginalized children into mainstream schooling; we, therefore, should be able to respond knowledgeably to the orphan crisis with appropriate tools developed by tackling similar issues. (Boler & Carrol, 2003, p. 4)

Although the research literature on specific methods for the schooling of orphans is limited (Levin & Haines, 2007), applicable insights into education can still be gained through the study of this literature. Through analyzing the literature and applying biblical principles to orphan education, this study proposed ideas for best practices in orphan education worldwide.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The guiding question for this study was, “What does a quality education for OVC look like?” Supporting questions were:

1. What do current theories and research on poverty education in the United States contribute to OVC education internationally?
2. How do the theories and research on orphan education compare or contrast with similar literature on poverty education in the United States?
3. What insights does a biblical perspective give to educating OVC?
4. What curriculum unique to OVC should be taught in orphanages outside the United States?
5. What instructional methods should be used to teach OVC in these orphanages?

POVERTY EDUCATION THEORIES AND RESEARCH

Ruby Payne

Ruby Payne (2005) is seen as one of the leading experts on poverty and education in the United States, with her professional development having been adopted in 38 states as of 2008 (Boomer, Dworin, May, & Semingson, 2008). The focus of her literature and professional development enables teachers and schools to understand children of poverty, while also equipping teachers with ideas to help these children succeed. Payne defines *poverty* as “the extent to which an individual does without resources” (2005, p. 7) and suggests that *resources* include financial, emotional, mental, spiritual, physical, support systems, relationships/role models, and knowledge of hidden rules.

Payne (2005) bases much of her research on a concept of “culture of poverty” (as cited in Payne, p. 140). The term *culture of poverty* was first coined by Oscar Lewis (1971; 1961; 1959) who claimed there are universal characteristics of poverty that can be identified throughout the world. Lewis (1971) suggests people of poverty share similarities in “family structure, interpersonal relations, time orientations, value systems, spending patterns, and the sense of community” (p. 137). “Poverty occurs in all races and in all countries” (Payne, 2005, p. 2), and the universal characteristics of people in poverty are found in “hidden rules” relating to possessions, money, personality, social emphasis, food, clothing, time, education, destiny, language, family structure, worldview, love, driving forces, and humor (p. 42). Payne says that those who grow up in a culture of poverty view each of these rules differently than someone from the middle or wealthy classes. According to Payne, a person of poverty views his or her destiny

fatalistically and views time in the present (i.e., lives for today). In contrast, someone from the middle class views destiny as within his or her control based on personal choices; likewise, time for the middle class focuses on planning for the future. In an educational setting, Payne believes children of poverty must learn the hidden rules of the middle class and teachers must help these children learn to live by these rules within the school. She says, “[A teacher’s] understanding of the culture and values of poverty will lessen the anger and frustration that educators may periodically feel when dealing with these students and parents” (2005, p. 45).

Multiple suggestions are given by Payne (2008; 2005) to help children of poverty succeed in school and in later life. Individuals leave poverty, according to Payne, because of a key relationship, a special skill or talent, a goal or vision, or because it is too painful to remain in poverty. Foremost among the suggestions for success is the importance of relationships with teachers and mentors. Teachers and educational administrators should build relationships through being positive role models and mentoring that serves as a catalyst to help students move out of poverty. Payne also recommends assessing students’ strengths and weaknesses, monitoring progress and planning interventions, translating the concrete into the abstract, training students to ask questions, and building relationships with parents as methods to help disadvantaged children succeed (2008). In addition, professional development should focus on a diagnostic approach to helping students: “insistence, expectations, and support need to be guiding lights in our decisions about instruction” (Payne, 2005, p. 108).

Arguments against Payne

In the past few years, some critics have spoken out against Ruby Payne’s studies. Gorski (2008) and others (Boomer, Dworin, May & Semingson, 2008) argue against the idea that a culture common to people of poverty exists. “The idea that poor people share more or less monolithic and predictable beliefs, values, and behaviors” is a myth, according to Gorski (2008, p. 1). Likewise, Boomer, Dworin, May & Semingson (2008) disagree with Payne’s (2005) generalization of poverty, arguing that her theories are not backed by accurate research, and (they argue) Payne puts the onus on the victim and not on the schools. Gorski (2008) says to help poor students learn, schools must address inequities among students and provide the best possible education for all through teaching higher-order thinking skills, using innovation in classroom instruction, and emphasizing holistic teaching and learning. More specifically, he suggests making curriculum pertinent to poor students to validate their intelligences and experiences.

Eric Jensen

Eric Jensen (2009) approaches educating the poor from a brain-research perspective discussing the ill effects of poverty on children’s cognitive ability to succeed. According to Jensen, poverty can be categorized into six types: situational, generational, absolute, relative, urban, and rural. His research emphasizes four principal risk factors challenging families living in poverty: “emotional and social challenges, acute and chronic stressors, cognitive lags, and health and safety issues” (p. 7). Jensen suggests educators can help students from poverty-stricken families by (1) deepening staff understanding of the effects of poverty on students’ health, emotions, and cognition, and (2) moving from “pity to empathy” (p. 12).

The problem . . . is that [pity] leads to lowered expectations. . . . Establish a school culture of caring, not of giving up. You can help foster such a culture by speaking respectfully, not condescendingly, of and to your student population, and by using positive affirmations, both vocally and through displays and posters (Jensen, 2009, p. 12).

Jensen (2009) narrows common characteristics of high-poverty, high-achieving schools and high-poverty, high-achieving classrooms to a set of factors applicable to the school-level and classroom level: support of the whole child, hard data, accountability, relationship-building, and an enrichment mind-set (p. 69). According to Jensen, educators need to be reminded that “every emotional response other than the six hardwired emotions of joy, anger, surprise, disgust, sadness, and fear must be taught” (p. 19). Humility, forgiveness, empathy, optimism, compassion, sympathy, patience, shame, cooperation, and gratitude are learned responses about which teachers must educate students. In addition, teachers must learn “to provide emotional support while they engage students’ interest and build their intellectual skills” (p. 151).

Corbett and Fikkert

In their book, *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty without Hurting the Poor . . . and Yourself*, Corbett and Fikkert (2012) suggest people’s understanding of poverty is flawed because they typically think of poverty as financial. Based on previous research by Myers (1999), Corbett and Fikkert (2012) describe poverty as being deficient in one or more of the following categories: Poverty

of Being (self-esteem); Poverty of Community (relationships); Poverty of Stewardship (sense of purpose, view of work and/or materialism) and Poverty of Spiritual Intimacy (p. 58). Furthermore, poverty can be labeled as crisis (needing immediate and temporary assistance), short-term (needing rehabilitation to work with individuals to move out of poverty), and long-term (needing development with people to change the circumstances). One commonality they find in people of poverty is the inability to change one's situation. Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen states, "It is the lack of freedom to be able to make meaningful choices—to have an ability to affect one's situation—that is the distinguishing feature of poverty" (as cited in Corbett & Fikkert, 2012, p. 67). "Poverty is the result of relationships that do not work, that are unjust, that are not for life, that are not harmonious or enjoyable. Poverty is the absence of shalom in all of its meanings" (as cited in Corbett & Fikkert, 2012, p. 59).

Reconciliation of relationships is the guiding compass for our poverty-alleviation efforts, profoundly shaping both the goals we pursue and the methods we use. The goal is not to make the materially poor all over the world into middle-to-upper-class North Americans. . . . Rather, the goal is to restore people to a full expression of humanness, to being what God created us all to be, people who glorify God by living in right relationship with God, with self, with others, and with the rest of creation (Corbett & Fikkert, 2012, p. 74).

Corbett & Fikkert (2012) state that a distorted worldview can also be a leading cause of material poverty:

- A distorted worldview concerning God can cause individuals or societies to hoard or waste materials.
- A distorted worldview concerning self can cause individuals or societies to believe they are unable to succeed and, therefore, to ultimately stop trying to succeed.
- A distorted worldview concerning others can cause some to prey on others who, then, see themselves as helpless and hopeless.
- A distorted worldview concerning the rest of creation views life fatalistically and may not believe in the idea of using the food resources the world has to offer to one's benefit. In addition, stewardship of the earth and one's resources might also be ignored.

Poverty can also be caused by broken systems when individuals, corporations, and/or governments make decisions that hurt individuals (Corbett & Fikkert, 2012). Educational systems can, in part, help break the grip of poverty through vocational training and teaching people to adapt to the rapidly changing global environment. However, any attempt to alleviate poverty without counsel and collaboration from the local community would be counter-productive.

Additional Research

Additional literature states there are common characteristics found among the poor and less fortunate. Sanchez-Jankowski (2008) suggests the urban poor have similar attitudes regarding the following: finances, spirituality, sex, support/assistance, desires, self-expression, love, children, dreams, and fear. He also argues that a culture of "scarcity" exists among the impoverished which is based on a worldview that influences current and future actions (p. 20). Likewise, Vaisey (2009) suggests worldview influences the actions, aspirations and expectations of poor youth. While both Sanchez-Jankowski (2008) and Vaisey (2009) veer away from the term "culture of poverty," each author suggests there are common cultural values which do enable individuals to succeed in life. Harrison (2000) says in order to move out of poverty, the focus of education should be on development instead of culture. His research and the research of Grondona (2000) show progressive cultures hold a different view than impoverished cultures on the following: time, work, frugality, education, advancement, community, ethics, justice, authority, and secularism.

Summary of Poverty Education Approaches

Although the literature reveals differences in the definition of poverty and whether or not a "culture of poverty" exists, the majority of authors agree that poverty goes beyond financial limitations. Payne (2005), Jensen (2009), and Corbett and Fikkert (2012) all agree that poverty can include a deficiency in financial, emotional, and relational resources. Payne, Corbett, and Fikkert state that poverty might also include spiritual limitations. Each of the authors reviewed agree that poverty is caused by both internal forces (things one can control) and external forces (outside of one's control). Payne, Jensen, Corbett, and Fikkert each advocate that individuals in poverty must become equipped to move themselves out of their situations and educators can help students through that process. Part of this equipping, according to some (Corbett & Fikkert, 2012; Harrison, 2000; Grondona, 2000; Sanchez-Jankowski, 2008; Vaisey, 2009), includes teaching the standards and values to succeed in school and in life beyond the classroom.

THEORIES AND RESEARCH SPECIFIC TO ORPHAN AND ORPHANAGE EDUCATION

Current research on orphans and orphanages emphasizes the importance of education as a means to improve one's life (Deters & Bajaj, 2008; Emond, 2009; Gumede, 2009; Takayanagi, 2010; UNICEF, 2012/2009). Schools and teachers are highly important in filling the gap left by the loss of one or more parents (Ogina, 2010). According to UNICEF (2009), "Education is critical to the future of all children, but especially to those who are orphaned or vulnerable" (p. vi). A child in Zambia said, "If you are uneducated, you will suffer. I want to get an education and I want to get a good job and help my family" (as cited in Takayanagi, 2010, p. 8). Several themes emerged in research specific to orphan education and education at orphanages: community involvement, meeting children's basic needs, the role of the teacher, educational curriculum, and the instructional environment.

Community Involvement

Children living in an orphanage often struggle with their sense of self and identity (Emond, 2009), feeling alone in society and lacking hope for their future. A community approach, community help, and community organizations were found to be helpful to connect students to their current world and also gave children a vision for life after the orphanage (Deters & Bajaj, 2008; Emond, 2009; Takayanagi, 2010). Many studies conclude that the most effective approach to educating orphans would be to have the children live in homes with families instead of orphanages and/or other government institutions. However, due to the increasing number of orphans worldwide, not enough families are available for many OVC. Because of this, local communities must help children successfully integrate into society when they become adults (Deters & Bajaj, 2008; Prisiazhnaia, 2008; Takayanagi, 2010). Additional community initiatives include: local leadership, volunteerism, consensus-based decision making, innovation, reciprocity, and collaboration with faith-based organizations (Deters & Baja, 2008).

Orphanages need to collaborate with children, parents, and teachers to find the most effective content and practices to meet OVC's educational needs (Cook, 2009). For example, the Pikler Institute is a residential nursery in Budapest that has been using a community approach to raising children for over 60 years (Gonzalez-Mena, 2004). The institute uses a collectivist setting where children live in groups, and teaches children to keep their individual goals while also coordinating those goals with group goals. In addition to this unique approach to group living and goal-setting, the institute creates a sense of security in children by focusing on continuity, consistency, and predictability in routines. Each of these community-focused methods has enabled the Pikler Institute to effectively prepare students for transitions into families without the emotional disturbances or cognitive impairments that are common among young orphans.

Meeting Basic Needs First

Orphaned children go to school while also dealing with psycho-social issues, traumas, stigmas, and expectations which all impact their success in school (Aicha Briggs, 2012; Boler, 2003; Deters & Bajaj, 2009). These children are at great risk of delayed development in communication (Kaler & Freeman, 1994) and in "associated behavioral, social, psychiatric, cognitive, and academic difficulties in the long term" (Levin & Haines, 2007, p. 222). Because orphans and vulnerable children have more diverse needs that are directly related to their upbringing, orphanages have to deal with a wider spectrum of tasks that Shakhmanova (2010) divides into three inter-related blocks: compensating, developmental, and correctional. Within each child is a core need to love and be loved, and White and Wright (2003) suggest children have five basic needs that also need to be met: security, significance, boundaries, community, and creativity. One study of village orphans in South Africa researched the importance of understanding the psycho-social (physical, emotional, social, mental and spiritual) well-being of orphans in the context of schooling (Gumede, 2009). The results of this study stressed the necessity of meeting Maslow's (1970) hierarchy of needs within the child before addressing the child's academic needs. This study is confirmed by research in Ghana that stresses the importance of helping children "understand and express feeling appropriately, develop a sense of self, develop social skills and positive peer and adult relationships and develop a positive and open approach to learning" (Deters & Bajaj, 2009, p. 43). Many agree that special training is necessary to equip educators on how to meet the basic needs and classroom management of orphans and street children (Freidus, 2011; Ogina, 2010; UNICEF, 2009).

Role of the Teacher

Research also advocates the importance of teachers as emotional and personal support to orphans and vulnerable children. A study of orphans in Cote d'Ivoire, West Africa (Aicha Briggs, 2012) showed that caring and schooling are intricately linked to one another and schools should provide an emotional support for OVC. The teacher "very often serves as the only carrier of the norms and values of the surrounding world in the children's eyes" (Shakhmanova, 2010, p. 76). The teacher of OVC is not only a mentor but also serves a pastoral role (Ogina, 2010) which includes counseling and psychological support of children (Aicha Briggs, 2012; Boler & Carroll, 2003; Deters & Baja, 2008; Gumede, 2009; UNICEF, 2009). "Teachers who empathize with the orphaned learners tend to assume the [pastoral] care-giving role and respond by providing material and sometimes emotional support . . . based on their background experience and religious belief" (Ogina, 2010, p. 7). This role includes teaching a sense of self and how to relate to society beyond the individual student's own experiences (Freidus, 2011). The personal interaction between the teacher and child satisfies children's "need to think of themselves as a unique personality and to get individual attention from an adult" (Astoiant, 2007).

Educational Curriculum

Curriculum for OVC focuses on helping students with basic needs while also equipping them emotionally, academically, and socially to survive beyond an institutionalized life (Deters & Bajaj, 2009; Gumede, 2009). Educational curriculum must address the unique needs of these children. For example, "A curriculum on self-image does not formally address disease, disparity and death; instead it informally addresses these issues by providing emotional health so that children are better able to respond when dealing with sickness and death" (Deters & Bajaj, 2009, p. 45).

Studies reveal that orphaned children struggle with knowing how to appropriately socialize with peers and/or adults (Kaler & Freeman, 1994; Prisiazhnaia, 2008; Shakhmanova, 2010). Social learning is also highly important to OVC development (Taneja, Sriram, Beri, Sreenivas, Aggarwal, Kaur, & Puliyel, 2001). Therefore, curriculum programs must be tailored to students' needs. This includes ideas like creating accelerated learning programs for those who have had education disrupted (UNICEF, 2012).

Orphan school curriculum should embrace concepts and tasks that prepare students for life after the orphanage (UNICEF, 2009).

In a situation where a child has lived in an orphanage from birth, his socialization is stunted The adolescent is not able to form an appropriate set of ideas about the life of society and the rules that govern functioning in society and this becomes a source of problems in life. (Prisiazhnaia, 2008, p. 26)

Ideal curriculum also addresses the teaching of self and life outside the orphanage (Freidus, 2011) through lessons and work or apprenticeship activities (Emond, 2009). "Dependency on the institution for support may extend long into adulthood, which many institutions may not be prepared to provide" (Freidus, 2011, p. 140). Lessons and activities to help students understand their individual personalities, cognitive interests, and individual abilities are also important in preparing them for work after school (Pantiukhina, 2009). Furthermore, research advocates that OVC should be taught values, convictions, attitudes, morals, and norms to help students cope effectively (Pantiukhina, 2009).

Flexibility in Instruction and Classroom Environment

Instructional methodology and classroom environment for effectively teaching OVC must be child-centered (Astoiant, 2007; Boler & Carroll, 2003; Cook, 2009; Pantiukhina, 2009; UNICEF, 2009) and flexible (UNICEF, 2009). Research at an orphanage in Belize showed "new and different ideas for learning can allow young children opportunity for healthy learning" (Cook, 2009, p. 13). Team teaching and integrated subject courses are quite helpful in engaging OVC (Prisiazhnaia, 2008). Instruction can also contain illustrations, exercises, role play, group discussion, storytelling, drama, etc. (UNICEF, 2009). Art therapy has also been helpful for students to learn to communicate and reflect about their lives before, during and after the orphanage (Ivanova, 2004). "Often the issue is not that these children have educational difficulties, but that they understand the material in a different way" (as cited in Ivanova, 2004, p. 14), which supports the necessity of using a variety of methods to engage students. These differentiated methods include activity-orientated learning (Pantiukhina, 2009), open learning, and distance learning (Boler & Carroll, 2003). Likewise, daily sessions of play are important to help children become more active, responsive and independent (Taneja, et al., 2001). "Through creating spaces of trust and safety to allow and encourage the sharing of what children think and feel, to develop consciousness on inequities

and exercise their moral imagination” (Rivage-Seul, 1987, in Deters & Bajaj, 2008), OVC will improve in their long-term growth and development.

COMPARING THE LITERATURE

Literature on poverty education in the United States and educating orphans and vulnerable children throughout the world has differences and commonalities. Despite the argument over whether or not a culture of poverty exists, several authors agree that in order to help children of poverty and OVC succeed, their past history and/or tragedies need to be addressed. It is necessary for the teacher to understand the culture and values of the child. Building relationship, role-modeling, and mentoring are vital for the teacher to help the child. Jensen (2009) suggests educators can help students from poverty-stricken families by (1) deepening staff understanding of the effects of poverty on students’ health, emotions, and cognition, and (2) moving from “pity to empathy” (p. 12). Teachers must learn “to provide emotional support while they engage students’ interest and build their intellectual skills” (Jensen, 2009, p. 12).

Assessing students’ strengths and weaknesses, monitoring progress and planning interventions, translating the concrete into the abstract, training students to ask questions, and building relationships with parents are all important in the role of the school, be it in the United States working with children of poverty, or in a developing nation at a school for orphans. Teaching higher-order thinking skills, using innovation in classroom instruction, and emphasizing holistic teaching and learning are seen as important in the literature.

Authors Corbett and Fikkert (2012) suggest that a distorted worldview is also a leading cause of material poverty. From their point of view, vocational training, teaching people to adapt to the rapidly changing global environment, and collaboration with a local community are highly important in educating the poor. The research of Prisiazhnaia (2008) and Freidus (2011) advocates the same necessity for preparing orphans to succeed in life beyond the orphanage.

A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

The Bible contains principles for education that relate to teaching orphans and vulnerable children. An examination of these principles offers Christians insight into assisting the poor and needy through the application of faith to the profession of education. Understanding these principles is important as Christian educators attempt to fulfill the Bible’s mandate to bring help and justice to OVC (Isaiah 56:1; Hosea 12:6; 1 John 3:16-18).

Orphans and Vulnerable Children in Scripture

There is an ongoing biblical call to bring justice to those who are suffering and helpless (Deuteronomy 24:17-22; Jeremiah 22:3, 16; 1 Peter 3:8-9). Biblical justice often aims at meeting the physical needs of orphans and widows (Exodus 22:22; Deuteronomy 27:19; Psalm 82:3; Isaiah 1:17; James 1:27). The cry of orphans and widows does not go unnoticed by God, who is “deeply in love with the poor and the outcast” (Davis, 2008, p. 30). God’s heart for the orphan is exemplified in Scripture, where the *fatherless* and *orphan* are mentioned over 40 times, the *poor* are mentioned nearly 150 times, and *children* are mentioned nearly 500 times. Psalm 10:14 and Psalm 68:5 define God as the helper and father of the fatherless. Deuteronomy 10:18 says, “[God] defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow” (NIV). In turn, Deuteronomy 15:11 commands that we should be “open-handed” to the poor and needy among us (NIV). Proverbs 19:17 says that whoever is kind to the poor “lends to the Lord” (NIV). Likewise, Jesus said, “Whatever you did for the least of these . . . you did for me” (Matthew 25:40, NIV). Mother Teresa applied this mandate to “the dying, the crippled, the mentally ill, the unwanted, the unloved—they are Jesus in disguise. . . . [Through the] poor people I have an opportunity to be 24 hours a day with Jesus” (as cited in Davis, p. 152).

Biblical Principles for Education

The “aim of Christian education is to see God revealed” and equip students to reveal God to others (Byrne, 1977, p. 191). The Bible says children should be taught several things: God’s laws (Deuteronomy 6:6, 11:17; Psalm 78:1-5); the fear of the Lord (Psalm

111:10; Proverbs 1:7, 2:6, 3:13, 4:5); and the teachings of Jesus Christ and righteousness (Ephesians 4:20-24; 2 Timothy 3:14-17; Titus 2:12; Hebrews 5:13-14; 2 John 1:9). The purpose of education, from a biblical perspective, is for students to understand and accept the truth and the fear of the Lord so they can grow and mature in wisdom (Gaebelin, 1968). Like Christ, students should be trained to grow spiritually, physically, emotional, and socially (Luke 2:52). Christian education “means the kind of instruction and training which leads one to a knowledge of the Scriptures and of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord and to living a holy life” (Byrne, 1977, p. 33). Finally, Christian education equips the student to love God and others in his or her life and profession (Van Brummelen, 2002; Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012).

The Bible outlines multiple concepts that children need to experience and learn (Wright, Budiardjo, & Yewangoe, 2003):

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To be delighted in • To be believed in • Love (Hosea 11:1-11) • Honest affirmations and encouragement, for who they are • To be made welcome (Matthew 18:5; 19:14) • Mutual responsibilities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practical care • Guidance • To be enabled to grow in their faith • Discipline • To be believed in • To be taught • To be children (p. 27-31) |
|---|--|

Greener (2003) suggests children also “need role models and teaching to build multiple coping strategies, whether this means altering one's response to environmental circumstances, changing the environment or seeking help from others to deal with problems” (p. 46).

Biblical Instructional Methodologies

The Bible shows that God uses multiple methods to present Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. From the sin of Adam and Eve in Genesis to the closing chapter of The Book of Revelation, the Bible presents the reconciliation of mankind to God the Father through Jesus Christ. In addition, Scripture focuses on the revelation and explanation of truth. Jesus’ teachings said, “You have heard that it was said. . . . But I tell you . . .” (Matthew 5:21-44). Jesus presented himself as “the way and the truth and the life” (John 14:6, NIV).

While the content of the Bible focuses on the impartation of truth, God taught in a way that was always relevant to the individual, the setting, and the audience. For example, God taught Noah through a rainbow, Moses through a shepherd’s staff, David through music, and Nebuchadnezzar through deliverance from difficulty. Jesus taught the disciples and the multitudes by using stories of fishing, agriculture, and current events. The Apostle Paul taught the Corinthians through secular idols, poetry, and playwrights.

God’s methods of instruction in Scripture are not only student-centered, but they encourage active learning, and challenge the individual to identify and apply what is taught:

Much of Jesus’ teaching required people to physically *do* something. Changing water to wine required servants to physically draw water (John 2:1–12). The fishermen were required to cast out nets. Peter learned a lesson about taxes by catching a fish. The ten lepers walked and were healed. The woman with the issue of blood followed Jesus through the crowd. In addition, Jesus healed by making mud and requiring the blind man to wash in the pool of Siloam (John 9:6–7) (Roso, 2010, p. 42).

CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TEACHING OVC

Having reviewed the research and discussed the topic from a biblical perspective, Christian educators can arrive at both curriculum content and instructional methods for teaching OVC. The literature suggests that a quality education for OVC is student-centered and prepares children for future life. Curriculum for OVC should meet children’s basic spiritual, physical, emotional, and social needs as a prerequisite to academic study (Aicha Briggs, 2012; Deters & Bajaj, 2009; Jensen, 2009; Payne, 2005). Children should be reconciled to God and others as a foundation of education (Corbett & Fikkert, 2012). To enable orphans to remain out of poverty, worldview education ought to include Grondona’s (2000) suggestions on progressive cultures regarding time, work, frugality, education, advancement, community, ethics, justice, authority, and secularism. Then, the curriculum should equip students with the

values to succeed academically, socially, and professionally (Corbett & Fikkert, 2012). The survival skills advocated by Wright, Budiardjo, and Yewangoe (2003) should also be part of the curriculum to meet children's spiritual and social needs.

A child-centered, flexible instructional environment is important for teaching children of poverty and OVC (Astoians, 2007; Boler & Carroll, 2003; Cook, 2009; Jensen, 2009; Payne, 2005; Pantiukhina, 2009; UNICEF, 2009). Teachers of OVC need to view their position as mentor, model, pastor, and teacher (Aicha Briggs, 2012; Boler & Carrol, 2003; Ogina, 2010). Much of the methodology for teaching orphans and children of poverty focuses on hands-on learning that is both individual and collaborative in nature. Applicable methods from the literature and Scripture include:

- Training students to communicate effectively and ask questions (Payne, 2005).
- Teaching holistically (Gorski, 2008).
- Enriching curriculum and instruction by connecting to students' interests and experiences (Jensen, 2009).
- Training for vocation (Corbett & Fikkert, 2012).
- Training students to adapt to change (Corbett & Fikkert, 2012).
- Using collaborative learning within the classroom (Corbett & Fikkert, 2012; Deters & Baja, 2008; Gonzalez-Mena, 2004).
- Using collaborative learning outside the classroom to connect students to life beyond the orphanage (Deters & Baja, 2008; Freidus, 2011; Gonzalez-Mena, 2004).
- Using community volunteers for teaching and training (Deters & Baja, 2008; Emond, 2009).
- Collaborating with faith-based organizations (Deters & Baja, 2008).
- Training students in individual goal-setting (Payne, 2009; Gonzalez-Mena, 2004).
- Team teaching (Prisiazhnaia, 2008).
- Teaching creativity and self-reflection through exercise, role-play, stories, drama and art therapy (Ivanova, 2004).

Like the Bible's teaching, education for orphans and vulnerable children should be active, individualized, content-based, and able to equip students for today and the future.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to analyze poverty education research, orphan education research, and biblical principles to propose ideas for best practices in orphan education worldwide. Poverty education research applicable to orphans emphasizes the importance of mentoring relationships (Payne, 2008), student-centered curriculum (Gorski, 2008), teaching positive emotional responses (Jensen, 2009), and teaching worldview to enable students to move out of poverty (Corbett & Fickkert, 2012). As Christian educators, helping those who cannot help themselves is a biblical mandate. "God says He wants us to battle injustice, to look out for orphans and widows, to give sacrificially. . . . God wants us to get some skin in the game and help make a tangible difference" (Goff, 2012). In order to educate orphans effectively we need to first know the student by listening to him or her and understanding the community he or she is from.

A focus on children and their community helps educators understand what needs to be taught and how to teach in ways that are culturally relevant. As Christian educators, it is also necessary to use research to equip students with a worldview that will help them succeed beyond the institution. This can be done by combining the research of poverty education in the United States, orphan education research in other countries, and the application of biblical principles. Coupling this research with the compassion of Christ will enable Christian educators to work alongside orphanages to better equip OVC to know Jesus Christ and succeed in life.

The word "compassion" is derived from Latin . . . "to suffer with." Compassion asks us to go where it hurts, to enter into places of pain, to share in brokenness, fear, confusion, and anguish. Compassion challenges us to cry out with those in misery, to mourn with those who are lonely, to weep with those in tears. Compassion requires us to be weak with the weak, vulnerable with the vulnerable, and powerless with the powerless. Compassion means full immersion in the condition of being human (Henri Nouwen, as cited in Davis, 2008, p. 111).

May Christian educators become compassionate leaders in the quest to help educate orphans throughout the world.

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